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KENYA



SUCCESS STORY

Educating Men on Reproductive Health Issues through Sports

By using a familiar and comfortable setting like a soccer tournament, men are more likely to be open and receptive to learning about health issues that are otherwise not openly discussed.



Deputy APHIA II Eastern Director Kennedy Manyonyi and tournament winners

A soccer tournament provides a familiar setting where men can receive information and services regarding issues of reproductive health and HIV/AIDS

From August to November 2008, soccer enthusiasts in Embu, Kenya, came together to attend the first ever “Men Who Care Plan & Protect Their Families” tournament. The tournament involved over 500 men and used sports as a means of spreading awareness about issues related to HIV/AIDS, family planning, and reproductive health, and is noted as being one of most highly attended sporting events ever in Embu.

Patriarchal traditions in Kenya have long excluded men from participating in discussions regarding sexual and reproductive health. By using a familiar and comfortable setting like a soccer tournament, men are more likely to be open and receptive to learning about health issues that are otherwise not openly discussed.

Messages about reproductive health issues were delivered in innovative ways during the tournament. These include having commentators deliver prevention messages during the games and using theatrical skits in order to make the messages stick. Quizzes on health topics were popular and sparked healthy competition between men, all trying to prove their knowledge about HIV/AIDS. In addition, men were given the chance to receive HIV/AIDS voluntary counseling and testing (VCT). At the end of the matches, men gathered to discuss what they learned during the exercises.

As a result of this first ever “Men Who Care Plan & Protect Their Families” tournament, there has been a notable surge in the number of clients seeking VCT and other health services. As an example, during the month of November, more than 60 clients received reproductive health services, and 265 clients were counseled and tested for HIV/AIDS. This was an increase of 70 percent over the month before, when only 155 clients were tested. When asked, a large number of clients stated that they learned of the services as a result of the recent soccer tournament.

This soccer tournament is an effective example of how sports can be used in innovative ways to deliver important health messages and promote healthy behavior. The program was supported by the APHIA II Eastern project – an innovative health project funded by

the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and led by USAID's partner organization Jhpiego, in cooperation with the Government of Kenya, the African Medical Research Foundation, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, Family Health International, Liverpool VCT Care and Treatment, CLUSA, and PATH.

"Greater male involvement in HIV/AIDS and reproductive health in Kenya has not had a high level of desired success. Using sports is a wonderful opportunity to engage men in a conversation," said Dr. Ken Chebet, APHIA II Eastern's Director.

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